

Revealed

SESSION 11

Genesis 41:14-21,33-37

Memory Verse: Genesis 41:16

God reveals His plans when we trust Him.

Session 5 began with a brief introduction to Rachel Saint, who devoted many years of her life to working among the Waorani (Auca) Indian tribes of Ecuador. Rachel's commitment to missions, however, began many years earlier when a wealthy woman took her to Great Britain for her eighteenth birthday. On their return trip, Rachel experienced a vision. Instead of being on a ship, she saw herself in a jungle clearing surrounded by brown-skinned, scantily-clad people beckoning her to come to them. That brief scene convinced Rachel that God's plan for her life involved taking the gospel to these people.

Rachel Saint experienced the reality that God reveals His plans when people trust Him. As you prepare this week, pray that you better understand what God wants to reveal about Himself to you in these verses. Then, ask Him to help you see how that fits into what He wants to communicate through you as you and the group seek to identify and fulfill His mission in your lives.



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Marco Polo is a popular game kids play in swimming pools. The player who is “it,” either blindfolded or with closed eyes, must try to tag someone else in the pool. When the person who is “it” shouts “Marco,” everyone else shouts “Polo” so that the person who is “it” gets a sense of direction to tag someone. But everyone in the pool is trying to keep that person from knowing which direction they should go. When we are trying to discern God’s will, we may feel like that person who is “it” in Marco Polo. Yet God wants us to know His plans, and He reveals His plans to those who trust Him. (PSG, p. 100)

How have you struggled to know God’s will?



Understand the Context (Genesis 40:1–41:57)

Genesis 39 ended with another apparent downturn in Joseph’s life. After serving faithfully in Potiphar’s household, Joseph was unfairly cast in prison for rejecting the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife. Nevertheless, the Lord was with Joseph, and he found favor with the prison warden.

In Genesis 40 the scene shifts to two of Pharaoh’s officers—the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Both men had offended Pharaoh and ended up with Joseph in prison. Each man had a dream, and each recounted his dream to Joseph. Giving credit to God, Joseph interpreted the cupbearer’s dream to mean that in three days Pharaoh would restore him to his former position. The baker’s dream signified that in three days he would hang from a tree.

Events occurred according to Joseph’s interpretation. Unfortunately for Joseph, the cupbearer failed to honor his promise to mention Joseph to Pharaoh.

After two more years, Pharaoh had two dreams that no one could interpret. In his first dream, seven sickly cows consumed seven healthy cows. In his second dream seven thin heads of grain swallowed seven plump heads. When no one could interpret the Pharaoh’s dreams, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph, and Pharaoh immediately called for him.

After being presented to Pharaoh, Joseph quickly declared that God would provide an interpretation. The Hebrew wording for “a favorable answer” (Gen. 41:16) doesn’t necessarily mean that the interpretation would please Pharaoh; but it would be correct, which should have calmed the king’s spirit.

Through these dreams God revealed His plans for the future. The seven healthy cows and seven plump heads of grain represented seven years of prosperity. The seven sickly cows and seven thin heads of grain represented seven years of famine. The doubling of the dream meant that God had determined the matter and the dreams would soon be fulfilled (41:32).

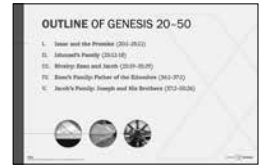
Following his God-given interpretation, Joseph provided some unsolicited advice. He outlined a description of the administrator whom Pharaoh should choose to lead the nation in preparing for the famine. The king recognized that Joseph’s wisdom and discernment made him perfect for the task. Pharaoh placed his signet ring on Joseph’s hand, clothed him in royal garments, and put a gold chain around his neck. In so doing, he made Joseph one of the most powerful men in Egypt—and in the world.

Joseph entered the service of Pharaoh at age thirty. He and his wife Asenath had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, whose descendants later formed two of Israel’s tribes. Joseph faithfully stored grain during the prosperous years and distributed it during the famine. The final verse of Genesis 41 sets the stage for Joseph’s brothers to reenter the story: “Every land came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain” (41:57a).

Read Genesis 41:14-21, 33-37. How did God prepare Joseph to be used by Him? How might believers today prepare themselves to be used of God? (PSG, p. 101)



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Genesis 20–50*) for reference during the session.



LIST: Lead the group to name games or activities that include looking for something or a player being blindfolded. (*Examples: Hide and Seek, Pin the Tail on the Donkey, and so forth*) Record responses on the board. If it's not mentioned, suggest Marco Polo.

READ: Allow a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 100 of the PSG and briefly review how the game is played. Talk about how the person chosen to be “it” must feel as they try to figure out where everyone is. Compare this to understanding God’s will.

ASK: **How have you struggled to know God’s will?** (PSG, p. 100)

CONTEXTUALIZE: Use Understand the Context and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Genesis 20–50*) to provide background for the session. Review the false charges made by Potiphar’s wife and the cupbearer’s forgetfulness.

TRANSITION: *Sometimes, seeking God’s will can feel like playing a game of spiritual Marco Polo. We call out, hoping to zero in on God’s voice, but He seems out of reach. Joseph likely wondered what God was doing. But God was still at work, getting ready for something Joseph never could have imagined.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of the lyrics of “Trust in You” by Lauren Daigle. If possible, play the song in the background as the group arrives. Allow volunteers to highlight some of the words and phrases in the song that are important to them. Lead a brief discussion on how the emotions expressed in the song might have been true for Joseph in prison. At the end of the session, play the song again. Read the chorus and encourage the group to reflect on what it means to totally trust Christ even when life doesn’t go as we expected.

Credit Given (Genesis 41:14-16)

14 Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh. **15** Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it.” **16** “I am not able to,” Joseph answered Pharaoh. “It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

Key Word

Pharaoh

This title for the kings of ancient Egypt means “great house.” The label first designated the royal palace and grounds. Later, from approximately 1500 to 550 BC, the Egyptians applied the title to their king. A **pharaoh** possessed absolute power. His roles included supreme commander of the armies, high priest of all religion, and chief justice of the royal court.

(v. 14) Quickly brought him: This phrase renders a single Hebrew verb that basically means “to run.” In the specific form in which it occurs in the original language, it means “to cause to run quickly.” When the king issued an order, his subjects were expected to respond with all diligence and speed.

(v. 14) Dungeon: The Hebrew word rendered **dungeon** is the same term translated “pit(s)” in Genesis 37:20,22,24,28. The Hebrew term can also be translated “well.” While the pit into which the brothers cast Joseph was an empty hole without water (Gen. 37:22,24), the same Hebrew term identifies a royal prison in Egypt, apparently attached to the house of the captain of the guards (40:3). Persons were confined in royal prisons for offending the king. Prisoners often experienced pitiable conditions, including meager rations and hard labor. Joseph, however, experienced God’s work in his life, which included a measure of grace from the jailer.

(v. 14) Shaved, changed his clothes: After Pharaoh sent for him, Joseph’s status was quickly reversed. He exchanged his slave garments for a courtier’s apparel. A change of garments was viewed as a luxury that only the wealthy could afford.

Joseph certainly **shaved** his beard because beards were associated with Egyptian gods. As a result, only the Pharaohs would adorn a beard. The fact that Hebrews wore beards is probably one reason among many that the Egyptians found Hebrews detestable.

But Joseph probably shaved his head, as well. Typically, for Hebrews, shaving one’s head was an outward expression of shame or grief (see Amos 8:10). But if Joseph had not completely shaved off all of his hair from the neck up, it would have been an affront to Pharaoh.

(v. 15) Dream: Dreams are important in Joseph’s story. His dreams resulted in conflict with his brothers. Although they schemed to get rid of the **dream** by getting rid of the dreamer, their plot actually advanced the God-given dream. Joseph the dreamer ended up in Egypt, where he provided the means of saving not only the masses in Egypt but also his own family.

Key Doctrine

God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 46:9-10.)

(v. 15) Interpret: The Hebrew verb translated **interpret** appears rarely in the Old Testament and always in connection with dreams. “Oneiromancy” [*oh-nigh-ro-man-see*] is the technical term for dream interpretation. In the ancient Near East, a whole discipline of dream interpretation existed, including manuals on the subject, but no science of dream interpretation developed in Israel. In the Old Testament, only Joseph and Daniel engaged in dream interpretation. When they did, the Scriptures make clear that they did not rely on their own wisdom. They always credited God’s revelation (Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:27-30).

EXPLORE Genesis 41:14-16

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APPLICATION POINT: Believers can point others to God when asked about past actions.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 41:14-16** while the group considers the request from Pharaoh and the response of Joseph. Point out that God had been with Joseph through all his difficult times and had prepared him for this moment.

ASK: **Who is the most prominent person you've ever met? How did you prepare yourself for that meeting?**

DIRECT: Lead the group to pages 102-103 of the PSG for information related to Joseph's need to change his clothes and be shaved. Note that Joseph needed to be prepared to meet the leader in a way that would not be offensive. Encourage adults to consider a modern-day equivalent to what Joseph was experiencing. Emphasize that, even in that moment, Joseph never forgot that God was the One orchestrating the events of his life.

ASK: **What keeps a person from giving God the credit He is due?** (PSG, p. 104)

TRANSITION: *Joseph confessed that God was the only One who could interpret dreams. For the second time Joseph was rescued from a pit or dungeon so God could use him to carry out His plans.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Bandana

Prior to the session, obtain a bandana that can cover someone's eyes. Enlist a volunteer to be blindfolded. Turn the person around several times and ask: **How difficult would it be for you to find the exit right now?** Take the person's hand and guide them to the door and remove the blindfold. Explain that in the same way the blindfold prevents safe travel without assistance, we struggle to see God's plans without totally putting our trust in Christ. Explain that when Joseph was called upon to interpret dreams, he was quick to admit his own limitations and give full credit to God.

Cows Consumed (Genesis 41:17-21)

17 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, **18** when seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows came up from the Nile and grazed among the reeds. **19** After them, seven other cows — weak, very sickly, and thin — came up. I’ve never seen such sickly ones as these in all the land of Egypt. **20** Then the thin, sickly cows ate the first seven well-fed cows. **21** When they had devoured them, you could not tell that they had devoured them; their appearance was as bad as it had been before. Then I woke up.”

Key Location

Nile:

This term primarily denotes a river or stream that forms a definite channel and usually designates the Nile River or its canals. The Nile River functioned as the “life” of ancient Egypt. The union of the White Nile flowing out of Tanzania and the Blue Nile coming from Ethiopia form the Egyptian Nile. Below the modern capital of Cairo and the nearby ancient capital of Memphis, the Nile River forms a great Delta. On the eastern edge of this Delta was located the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived after coming to Egypt. The annual flooding of the Blue Nile accounted for the fertile black silt deposits that, along with irrigation, allowed the Egyptians to produce crops in large quantities. If the winter rains failed, disastrous famines resulted (see Gen. 41).

(v. 18) Seven: Many numbers in the Scriptures have a symbolic meaning. However, in this context, it would seem that **seven** is probably more literal, highlighting the exact lengths of both abundance and famine.

If it is symbolic, though, it could suggest completeness. The seven good years followed by seven years of famine could suggest a complete cycle. In similar passages, God’s work in creation resulted in a seven-day week, while some Jewish festivals lasted seven days. Jesus later taught His followers to forgive seventy times seven, representing complete or unlimited forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-22).

(v. 18) Well-fed: The Hebrew wording basically means “fat.” The term occurs in various contexts in the Old Testament. It describes healthy human beings in Daniel 1:15. It depicts healthy animals and vegetation in Genesis 41:2,5. In Ezekiel 34:3 the word identifies the best portion of meat that can be eaten. Finally the term can also convey prosperity (Ps. 73:4).

(v. 18) Cows: Unlike bulls, cows were never used as sacrificial animals with the exception of the red heifer (Num. 19:1-10). The red heifer’s ashes were mixed with the water of purification to remove defilement acquired through contact with a dead body (Num. 19:11-22). The writer of the book of Hebrews referred to this sacrifice when discussing the effectiveness of Christ’s blood for cleansing from sin (Heb. 9:13-14).

Two prophets mentioned cows symbolically. Hosea compared Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord with the obstinacy of a stubborn cow (Hos. 4:16). And Amos used the imagery “cows of Bashan” to symbolize the luxury of the women of Samaria who were indifferent to needy individuals (Amos 4:1). The fertile area of Bashan in the northernmost region of biblical Palestine was well-known for raising cows.

(v. 18) Reeds: This term, perhaps of Egyptian derivation, denoted marsh grass or bulrushes. Several species of reeds existed. The common reed grew in shallow water or wet, salty sand. Its bamboo-like stems could be made into pens. Another, the papyrus sedge, grew along the Nile, though it no longer grows wild in Egypt. Its tall, spongy stems were used to make rafts, baskets, and papyrus paper. Finally, the cattail or reed mace, is often referred to as bulrush. This last species seems to have been the one among which the baby Moses was hidden (Ex. 2:3).

(v. 19) Weak: The word emphasizes physical or material deprivation. In some contexts it refers to lower classes in Israel, such as the people left behind after the Babylonian exile (2 Kings 24:14).

EXPLORE Genesis 41:17-21



APPLICATION POINT: Believers should pay attention to ways God reveals His plans.

READ: Direct the group to read Genesis 41:17-21 silently, noting details in Pharaoh's dream.

REVIEW: Direct adults to read the information for Genesis 41:17-21 on pages 104-105 of the PSG. Encourage them to identify any words, phrases, or thoughts that stick out to them. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share what resonated with them. Use information from page 126 of the Leader Guide to supplement the key points from the verses.

SUMMARIZE: Recap Genesis 41:22-32 where Pharaoh's dream is explained. Point out that Joseph recognized that God was giving Pharaoh a look into the future. Note that this was an act of grace so plans could be made to limit the impact of the famine.

DISCUSS: How does the way God revealed the future to Pharaoh compare to other ways God reveals His plans? (PSG, p. 106)

TRANSITION: *With God's help, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. From there, it was up to Pharaoh to decide what to do. In truth, though, God was orchestrating everything to fulfill His plans. He uses even powerful human leaders to achieve His purposes.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Word Study

Prior to the session, gather several concordances and Bible commentaries. Direct the group's attention to the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 106). Instruct adults to form teams of two to four persons to work on the activity and to answer the final question in the activity. (NOTE: For smaller groups, an individual can be a team. For larger groups, more than one team can study the same passage.) Provide each team with a concordance or Bible commentary. Allow a few minutes for teams to report. Encourage adults to dig into verses not assigned to their teams during the week.

Plan Defined (Genesis 41:33-37)

33 “So now, let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. **34** Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. **35** Let them gather all the excess food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh’s authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve it as food. **36** The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine.” **37** The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

Key Word

Discerning

This designates knowledge that is superior to information gathering. While the Hebrew verb translated “to know” generally designates the process by which a person gains knowledge through experience, the verb rendered “to discern” refers to the power of judgment and perceptive insight that is demonstrated in the use of knowledge. Such discernment is a gift of God and is not automatic. It requires diligence and character. (See Prov. 3:5-6.)

(v. 33) Wise: In the ancient world, wisdom represented a way of thinking and an attitude related to life’s experiences. It encompassed basic morality, secular affairs, artistic skill, and loyalty to God. For example, wisdom characterized the craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1-6). Wisdom also was required of leaders and administrators (Deut. 34:9).

Old Testament wisdom reflected the teaching of a personal God who is the Source of all wisdom. He expected His people to reflect His character in life’s practical affairs. Thus, wisdom for the Hebrews was not merely theoretical. It was practical, based on God’s revealed principles of right and wrong. God’s people were to apply this wisdom in daily living.

(v. 19) Egypt: In contrast to modern Egypt, ancient Egypt was confined to the Nile River Valley. It consisted of a narrow ribbon of fertile land surrounded by desert. The Hebrews referred to it as Mizraim, likely a reference to Noah’s grandson (1 Chron. 1:4,8).

Egyptian religion was highly complex. Some of the gods the Egyptians worshiped were personifications of nature such as the sun, the earth, and the Nile River. Others personified abstract concepts like justice. Some gods were worshiped in animal form.

(v. 34) Overseers: This term can also be rendered “officers.” It can designate civil, religious, or military superintendents. The word identifies a subordinate who has been placed in a position of oversight over others. The assignment could be permanent or temporary. The Hebrew word is used in Esther 2:3 to designate men chosen to gather beautiful young virgins from which King Ahasuerus could select a queen.

(v. 34) Fifth of the harvest: Storing twenty percent of the grain from each of the seven years of abundant harvests would provide a reserve during the years of famine. To be successful, this collection plan required the full weight of Pharaoh’s authority.

(v. 36) Famine: In biblical times, such an extreme shortage of food generally resulted from drought. Sometimes, droughts and famines resulted from God’s judgment (Deut. 11:16-17; 1 Kings 8:35-36) and His desire for people to repent (Amos 4:6-8).

Other natural forces besides drought also caused famine, including locusts, blight, and hail (Joel 1:4; Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17). Such famines often were severe (2 Kings 6:25-28). One such time famine occurred when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem before the city fell in 586 BC (Lam. 4:4-10). The most devastating famine, however, is the famine of “hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11).



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can demonstrate trust when responding to God's plans.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 41:33-37** while the group listens for Joseph's recommendation to Pharaoh.

DISCUSS: Write the following on the board or a large sheet of paper: *Steps to solving a problem*. Encourage adults to suggest an effective process for analyzing problems and finding solutions. Allow a couple of volunteers to share their own process for solving problems and when they have put that process into practice.

ASK: **What is the difference between identifying a problem and identifying a solution? What is the value of proposing a plan when facing a challenge?** (PSG, p. 107)

EXPLAIN: Briefly share Pharaoh's response from Genesis 41:38-44. Lead the group in a brief discussion of why this was a wise course of action. Provide copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Joseph as a Leader in Egypt*) and encourage the group to scan the information and to share what sticks out to them. Share that this handout will also be helpful as the next couple of sessions reveal how God worked out His plans through Joseph.

TRANSITION: *Joseph's plan provided a solution. By trusting God in prison, he put himself in a position to be used by God. The steps toward fulfilling Joseph's dreams as a teenager were still moving forward more than a decade later.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Testimony

Prior to the group time, enlist a volunteer to share about a time when he or she felt God leading them to take a step of faith into a new situation or challenge. Ask the person to highlight how they knew this was God's plan for them. After the volunteer has shared with the group, provide time for adults to ask questions. Encourage them to draw comparisons to the volunteer's need for faith and Joseph's reliance on God.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 108 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers can point others to God when asked about past actions.*
- *Believers should pay attention to ways God reveals His plans.*
- *Believers can demonstrate trust when responding to God's plans.*

REVIEW: Invite the group to rank these statements from “easiest” to “hardest.” Encourage adults to talk with God this week about building on the one they find easiest and improving the others.

ASSESS: Lead the group to reflect on and evaluate their own lives by addressing the following questions: **How can you demonstrate your trust in God when He reveals His plans to you? How do you demonstrate your trust in Him when you are unable to discern His will?** (PSG, p. 108)

PRAY: Close the session by praising the Lord for His guidance. Ask Him to guard the hearts of each adult and to teach them how to faithfully seek and obey God's plan for them.

After the Session

Reinforce the study by encouraging the group to reflect on how they are trusting in God's plan for their life even when the way may seem unclear. Send the group a text or email letting them know that you are praying for them. Be sure to ask them to share specific ways you can pray for them during the week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com.**)

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